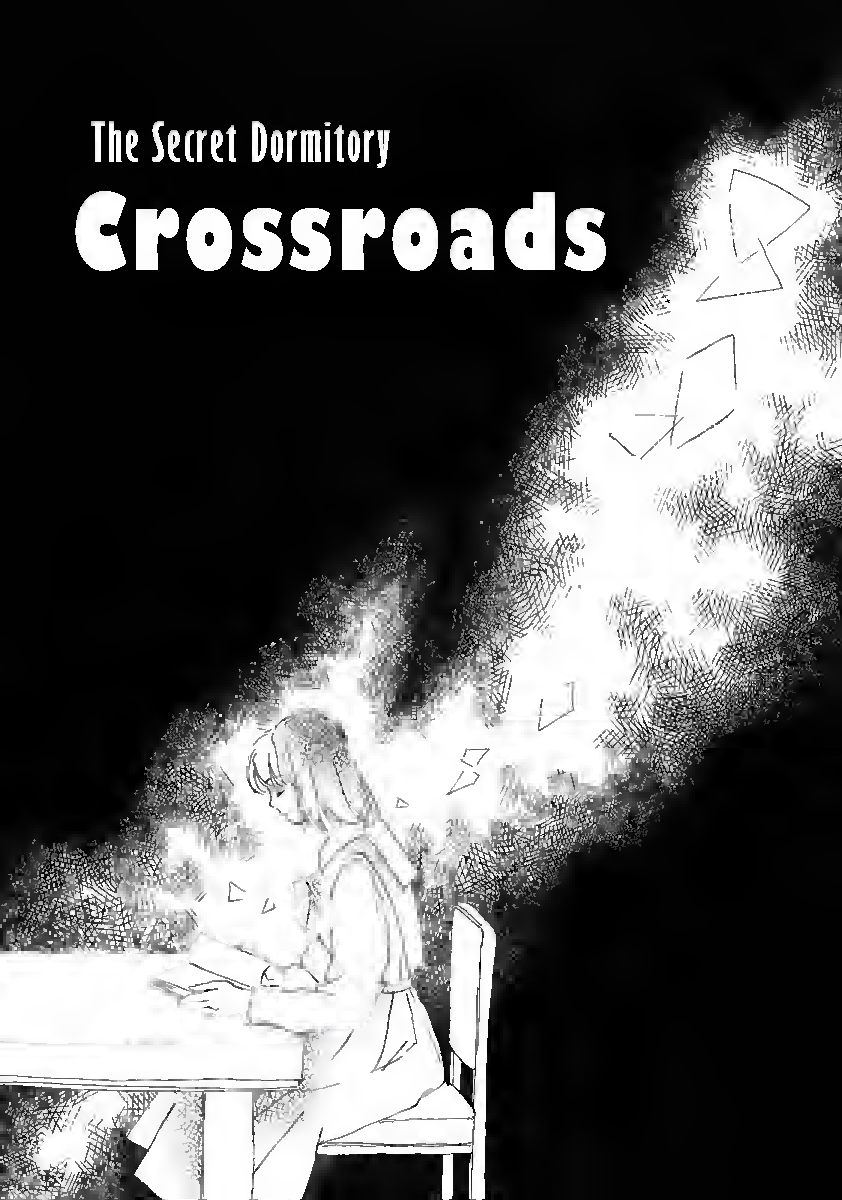
Cheers!
Cheers.
clink
clink
Cheers!
Somebody eat the sashimi*!
I'm putting some meat in the pot!
Not since graduation, in my case
We haven't gotten together like this in ages
translator's note: Thinly-sliced raw meat, often fish
No, thanks.
Oh.
Want some sake instead?
you're not drinking, Nariko.
Hey,
It's not that surprising Nari-chan *is* a Mrs. now, you know
Huuuh?!
Huh? Don't tell me you've got a bun in the oven?!
I'm avoiding alcohol at the moment

Will this be your first?
No, I have a three-year-old, too.
Oh! Our Nariko, a wife and mother!
We're all getting old.
Of course we are! We're the same age! 9
So, you're a mom now, Nari-chan.
TEENICE!
You know,
I can just picture you in a white apron with a whiff of vanilla

The Secret Dormitory

Crossroads



THANKS, NACCHAN!
YOU WERE A REAL LIFE-SAVER TODAY.
Ready to head back?
You're welcome
OH? THERE'S SOMEONE STILL HERE.
HUH?
EXCUSE ME!
WE'RE CLOSED FOR THE DAY!
.....
silence...

HELLOOO!
.....
Grr!
WE'RE CLOSING THE LIBRARY NOW!
EXCUSE ME!
stomp
stomp
stomp
stomp
THAT'S IT FOR TODAY.
thud

CHECK-OUTS ARE CLOSED FOR THE DAY.
PLEASE PUT YOUR BOOK BACK ON THE SHELF.
WHAT ARE YOU--
swssh
whoosh
HUH?
..IS THIS PLACE...
IT'S NOT A BOOK.
...IT'S MY DIARY.
.....

pat!
?
?
szin
clack ☆
you're real, all right ♫
pat
pat
?
?
?
YUP.
AWFULLY SKETCHY, DON'T YOU THINK?
whisper
whisper
whisper
LOOKS LIKE I STAYED TOO LATE.
SORRY ABOUT THAT!
BYE!
WHOA, THERE.

dash
.....
UH-OH
OH! I'M SORRY.
THAT WAS AYAKO.
NARI-CHAN...?
!
NAH, THAT'S NOT POS-SIBLE.
Silly me!
Hahaha
.....
She went back?
That's right! Ayako's returned to the nest. She's all fired up about her teaching job at Shouka!
I wouldn't call that "returning to the nest"

NO, NO,
I NEED TO GO FURTHER BACK...
Let's start with some information on the usage of the present perfect tense...
The past perfect tense is "had been" plus "ing."
OH, NO!
STOP!
I see we have a request
shriek
flwip
Watch out! Aya-chan launches into lectures when she gets drunk!
TWO YEARS... FOUR... EIGHT...
BACK TO A PLACE WHERE WE COULD STILL BE EQUALS. ON THE SAME LEVEL. FAIR.

NARIKO!
DID YOU HEAR?
MISATO GAVE THE WEIRDEST ANSWER EVER IN WORLD HISTORY CLASS.
WHAT DID YOU PUT?
THE RIGHT ANSWER WAS "SPICES," BUT IT JUST WOULDN'T COME TO ME.
"PEPPER."
Kyahahaha!
YOU COULDN'T EVEN COME UP WITH "SEASONING"?
THAT'S JUST LIKE YOU, MISATO!
Misato?
Oh, she's in London right now

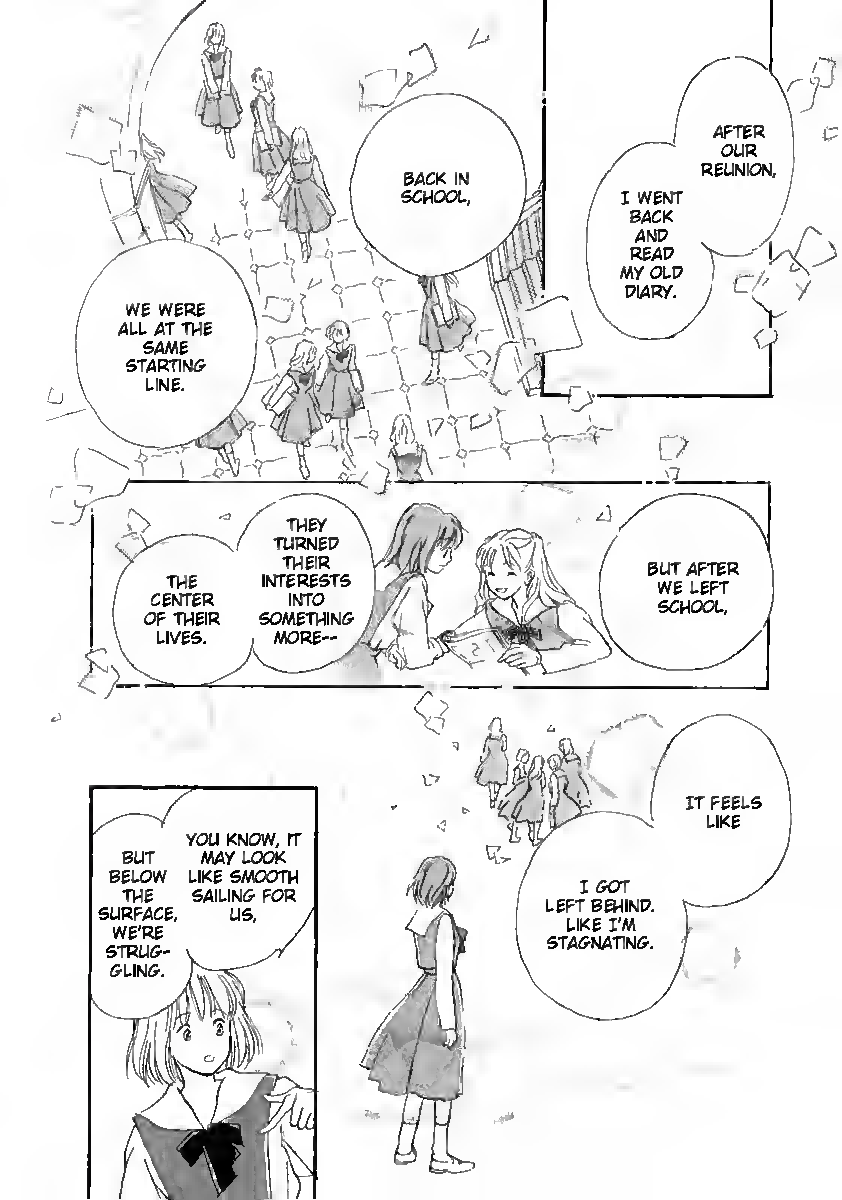
I can't even get ahold of her.
This one seems to be keeping her quite busy.
She's doing some training for her job.
Is she traveling?
What does she do?
Something to do with aroma-therapy...
I NEED TO GO BACK FURTHER
NO,
rustle
It was still the USSR at the time
WEREN'T THE SOVIET JUDGES A LITTLE TOO LENIENT?
HEY, DID YOU SEE THE NHK TROPHY YESTERDAY?

Here's my card.
Really? That's so cool
A sports writer?
THOSE JUMPS BARELY GOT OFF THE ICE. WHY WOULD THEY GIVE...
I saw the interview you did for that magazine.
Oh, I had to go to Canada for that one.
I was so flustered
In the interview, I couldn't even get the word 'profile' across!
I guess they say it 'pro-FILE' not 'pro-feel'
Man, that place! When I had trouble replying in English,
they'd switch to French!
Pitiful
Maybe I should take some classes
THIS ISN'T RIGHT EITHER

tmp!
YOU'RE MORE OF A SPRINTER, NARI-CHAN.
72
AHAHA!
OH, GEEZ! THAT'S THE NUMBER OF WORLDLY DESIRES IN BUDDHISM.
wheeze
wheeze
YOU MADE IT! HERE YOU GO.
108
She's asleep.
SHE'S A SLOW RUNNER, AND A TOTAL SNOOZE, TOO...
ARGH! I EVEN LOST TO ANDOU!
How humiliating
She's a novelist.
Hmm?
She didn't get any sleep last night. She was up all night finishing a manuscript
Andou-san can't hold her liquor, huh?

I can't bring myself to wake her up
until we move on to the next ban
Let's let her sleep
Hmm, she did always have her nose stuck in a book, huh?
Wow!
A novelist?!
Hey, I've been wondering...
Where'd you get that tan, Izumi?
It's not the season for it
Hehe! I was visiting the islands in the south for a while.
Tch!
Living it up, aren't you?
cough cough
Oh, sorry, too smoky for you?
You shouldn't smoke! There's a pregnant woman here!
OH!
You're right. Sorry, sorry!

NARI-CHAN.
PHEW!
I CAUGHT YOU.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, AYAKO?!
And why did you dress up like a schoolgirl?
IS THAT ANY WAY TO GREET AN OLD CLASS-MATE?
Dress up
WHAT'S WRONG, NARI-CHAN?
IT MUST BE NICE TO BE YOU, AYAKO.
YOU HAVE SELF-CONFIDENCE. YOU'RE FULL OF LIFE.


AFTER OUR REUNION,
I WENT BACK AND READ MY OLD DIARY.
BACK IN SCHOOL,
WE WERE ALL AT THE SAME STARTING LINE.
THE CENTER OF THEIR LIVES.
THEY TURNED THEIR INTERESTS INTO SOMETHING MORE--
BUT AFTER WE LEFT SCHOOL,
IT FEELS LIKE
I GOT LEFT BEHIND. LIKE I'M STAGNATING.
YOU KNOW, IT MAY LOOK LIKE SMOOTH SAILING FOR US,
BUT BELOW THE SURFACE, WE'RE STRUG-GLING.

Not listening.
MISATO'S IN LONDON,
YAGI-CHAN WENT TO CANADA,
YOU'RE A PASSION-ATE EDUCA-TOR,
IZUMI'S HAVING A BLAST DOWN IN THE ISLANDS,
HEY.
HEY.
HEY!
ANDOU-SAN'S A NOVELIST,
Shiho has opened a cram school with her husband.
mutter
mutter
mutter
mutter
YOU KNOW, MISATO HAS CHANGED JOBS A BUNCH OF TIMES,
AND IZUMI STILL ONLY WORKS PART-TIME.
She's the grasshopper type.*
*note: Like in the fable "The Ant and the Grasshopper"
AND YOU WEREN'T THE ONLY HOUSEWIFE
AT THE REUNION, REMEMBER?
TOMOMI EVEN BROUGHT A PHOTO ALBUM OF HER KIDS.
SHE GUSHED ABOUT THEM TO EVERY-ONE.
NARI-CHAN,
MAYBE YOU'RE JUST JEALOUS...
could that be it?
BULLSEYE!
GLARE

I GUESS-- I GUESS I JUST BELONG IN A WHITE APRON WITH A WHIFF OF VANILLA, THEN!
A HOUSEWIFE!
Was Yagi-chan the one who said that?
...WOW, THAT MUST HAVE REALLY BOTHERED HER.
I think she meant it as a compliment, though.
SO YOU WANT A DO-OVER?
YOU WANT TO HIT THE RESET BUTTON ON EVERY-THING YOU'VE DONE?
BACK HERE, THERE ARE STILL SO MANY PATHS BEFORE ME,
AND I'M FREE TO CHOOSE WHICH TO TAKE.
HOW I WANT HIM TO PUT HIS OWN SOCKS IN THE LAUNDRY BASKET!
WHERE THE SLIPPERS SHOULD GO IN THE BATH-ROOM!
I'M SICK OF ARGUING WITH HIM OVER LITTLE THINGS LIKE THAT!
HUH?
Oh, you mean your husband
It's hard to take that seriously when you're looking like that
ISN'T THAT WHAT EVERYDAY LIFE IS LIKE IN A FAMILY?

...MY KID ASKED ME,
"WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GROW UP, MOMMY?"
THAT INNOCENT QUESTION GAVE ME A GOOD LAUGH,
BUT THEN, MY HEART SKIPPED A BEAT.
NARI-CHAN,
HAVE YOU COMPLETED YOUR GAME OF LIFE?*
HAVE YOU REACHED THE END OF THE BOARD?
.....
THEN YOU'RE STILL AT A CROSS-ROADS, AREN'T YOU?

*translator's note: In the original she refers to the Japanese board game "sugoroku."

YOU STILL HAVE
PLENTY MORE AHEAD OF YOU.

SENSEI?
"WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GROW UP," HUH?
I WAS JUST LAMENTING HOW
IF I STAY HERE, I'M GOING TO KEEP PUTTING OFF GETTING MARRIED.
IS SOMETHING WRONG?
YOU'RE STANDING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE HALLWAY, MUTTERING TO YOURSELF.
.....
I HAVE A CORRECTION!
Sensei!
LET'S HEAR IT.

pitch black
OH? THE LIBRARY'S ALREADY CLOSED?
DON'T COUNT ME OUT YET! HOW RUDE
Hey!
bonk
YOU'VE MISSED YOUR CHANCE ENTIRELY, HAVEN'T YOU?
YOU HAVEN'T JUST PUT OFF GETTING MARRIED,
WHAT WILL YOU GIVE ME IN RETURN?
C'MON, MARIE-CHAN, WON'T YOU OPEN IT FOR JUST A MINUTE? PRETTY PLEASE?
Hey
...
YES, WE CLOSED IT JUST NOW.
Please come back another day
Eeeek!
NO WAY!
HEY! DON'T!
WELL,
HOW ABOUT A KISS?

IF YOU'RE AT A CROSSROADS AND YOU DON'T KNOW WHICH PATH TO TAKE,

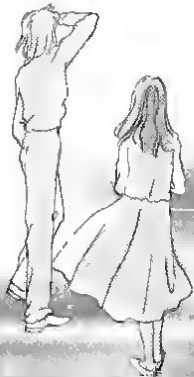
CLOSE YOUR EYES

AND TRY OUT THIS SECRET INCANTATION:

"WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE WHEN YOU GROW UP?"

END

Lililicious~may its fragrance encompass you
lililicious@hanmail.net, http://lililicious.net



The Secret Stairs

chapter 17

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